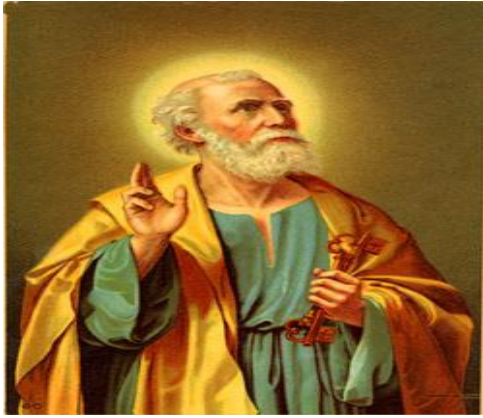


## ~ Saint Peter ~



Saint Peter also known as Peter the Apostle, Simon Peter, Simeon, Simon, or Cephas, was one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus and one of the first leaders of the early Christian Church.

Peter is always listed first among the Twelve Apostles in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts. Along with James the Elder and John he formed an informal triumvirate within the Twelve Apostles. Jesus allowed them to be the only apostles present at three particular occasions during his public ministry, the Raising of Jairus' daughter, Transfiguration of Jesus and Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter is often depicted in the gospels as spokesman of all the Apostles. Peter was considered along with James the Just and John the Apostle as the three Pillars of the Church. Legitimized by Jesus' appearance, Peter assumed leadership of the group of early followers. He was soon eclipsed in this leadership by James the Just, "the Brother of the Lord".

The Catholic Church speaks of the pope, the bishop of Rome, as the successor of Saint Peter.

This is often interpreted to imply that Peter was the first Bishop of Rome.

In the epilogue of the Gospel of John, Jesus is presented as hinting at Peter's death: "But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." This is interpreted by some as a reference to Peter's crucifixion.

According to the story, Peter, fleeing Rome to avoid execution meets the risen Jesus. In the Latin translation, Peter asks Jesus, "Quo vadis?" (Where will you Go)? He replies, "*Romam eo iterum crucifigi*" ("I am going to Rome to be crucified again"). Peter then gains the courage to continue his ministry and returns to the city, where he is martyred. Early Church tradition says that Peter died by crucifixion (with arms outstretched) at the time of the Great Fire of Rome in the year 64.

Catholic tradition also holds that Peter's inverted crucifixion occurred in the gardens of Nero, with the burial in Saint Peter's tomb nearby.

In the early 4th century, Emperor Constantine I decided to honor Peter with a large basilica. Because the precise location of Peter's burial was so firmly fixed in the belief of the Christians of Rome, the church to house the basilica had to be erected on a site that was not convenient to construction. The slope of the Vatican Hill had to be excavated. There were also moral and legal issues, such as demolishing a cemetery to make room for the building. The focal point of the Basilica, both in its original form and in its later complete reconstruction, is the altar located over what is said to be the point of Peter's burial.

The skull of Saint Peter is claimed to reside in the Archbasilica of Saint John Lateran since at least the ninth century, alongside the skull of Saint Paul. In 1950, human bones were found buried underneath the altar of St. Peter's Basilica. The bones have been claimed by many to have been those of Peter. An attempt to contradict these claims was made in 1953 by the excavation of what some believe to be Saint Peter's tomb in Jerusalem. However along with this supposed tomb in Jerusalem bearing his previous name Simon (but not Peter), tombs bearing the names of Jesus, Mary, James, John, and the rest of the apostles were also found at the same excavation—though all these names were very common among Jews at the time.

In the 1960s, items from the excavations beneath St Peter's Basilica were re-examined, and the bones were identified as male of about 61 years of age from the 1st century. This caused Pope Paul VI in 1968 to announce them most likely to be the relics of Apostle Peter. On November 24, 2013, Pope Francis presented part of the relics, consisting of bone fragments, for the first time in public during a Mass celebrated in St. Peter's Square.

On July 2, 2019, it was announced that Pope Francis had transferred nine of these bone fragments within a bronze reliquary to Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

Bartholomew, who serves as head of the Eastern Orthodox Christian church, described the gesture as "brave and bold". Pope Francis has said his decision was born "out of prayer" and intended as a sign of the ongoing work towards communion between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

The majority of Saint Peter's remains, however, are still preserved in Rome, under the high altar of St. Peter's Basilica.